



Date: April 8, 2005

To: Mayor Greg Nickels, the Northeast Seattle Design Review Board, and Diane Sugimura, Director, Department of Planning and Development

From: Ron LaFayette, Chair, and Michelle Rupp, Vice-Chair, on Behalf of the Northgate Stakeholders Group

Subject: STAKEHOLDERS ADVICE #6 CONCERNING PLANS FOR THE NORTHGATE COMMONS/ERA CARE PROJECT

The resolution establishing the Northgate Stakeholders Group assigned the Stakeholders the task of reviewing and commenting upon the Northgate Commons project proposed by developer Bruce Lorig and ERA Care. This project is being jointly designed and coordinated with the City of Seattle's development of the Thornton Creek Channel.

The Northgate Stakeholders Group has met with Lorig Associates representatives several times and has reviewed plans in detail in their present conceptual stage. We hope that our formal Advice on this project will have value and application to the developers and the City as the project proceeds.

As Stakeholders, we believe that all review stages should recognize that this project is a very positive and significant step in the redevelopment of the Northgate area. Taken as a whole, the Thornton Creek Channel and Northgate Commons/ERA Care project will create impressive urban spaces that will enhance economic vitality and improve quality of life. The Northgate Stakeholders Group endorses these projects and the related requests for changes to development standards to modify building height limits and reduce required parking capacity. In this advice, we detail that endorsement and call upon the developers and the City to take additional steps to make certain that this development ties well to its surrounding neighborhood and that parking impacts are monitored and addressed.

As we understand it, this review process has several steps, including:

- Planning discussions between City departments and Lorig and ERA Care representatives on several matters related to the Northgate Commons and Thornton Creek Channel project, including integrated site designs, pedestrian connections between the two projects, and connecting to the surrounding area; public access between the two projects; and the impact of the Lorig development on neighboring properties. There have also been additional planning discussions with King County related to shared parking and the new 3rd Ave NE

extension, pedestrian connections, and other improvements to streets adjacent to the South Lot.

- Review of multiple design issues by the City of Seattle Design Review Board. The Design Review Board has the authority to grant a number of departures from the Land Use Code on various design issues (note, however, that the changes to height and parking quantity are not within the Design Review Board's authority; those issues will be decided by the City Council).
- Review by the Department of Planning and Development of a Master Use Permit and other contract rezone requests. This review will result in recommendations to the Hearing Examiner and City Council.
- Review, a hearing and recommendation by the City's Hearing Examiner.
- Review by the City Council under contract rezone process. This review primarily affects two components of the proposed project: 1) waiver and modification of requirements for parking quantity and 2) changes in the height limit of the zone. Changes to the height limit include reducing the maximum height on the westerly half of the site from 125 feet to 85 feet and raising the maximum height limit of the easterly half of the site from 65 feet to 85 feet. We understand that the City Council's decision is quasi-judicial and have asked the Department of Planning and Development to include this Advice Memorandum in the formal record that is sent to the City Council.

The Stakeholder Review Process:

Even at its present conceptual stage, the Northgate Commons/ERA Care project is very complex. The Northgate Stakeholders Group was provided numerous opportunities to hear from Lorig and ERA Care representatives and from City and County officials with regard to the project's design and impact. Initial descriptions of the project were given to Stakeholders during their 2004 review of Thornton Creek Channel alternatives. The principal meetings enabling Stakeholder review and preparation of this Advice included:

- A major presentation from Bruce Lorig and ERA Care at the February 1, 2005 Stakeholder meeting.
- A follow-up presentation from representatives of Lorig and ERA Care providing additional detail on February 24. This meeting included information on possible departures from City code relating to building height and parking requirements. Stakeholders made several requests for additional information. Because of the volume of issues to be dealt with, the Stakeholders agreed to an informal discussion and additional Stakeholder meeting to discuss further their draft Advice.
- On March 8, Bruce Lorig and ERA Care representatives met with a group of Stakeholders for discussion and to answer questions, and then made a presentation at the Northgate Community Forum organized by the City with the assistance of the Stakeholders.
- At the Stakeholders' next full meeting on March 15, the Stakeholders asked further questions of representatives of Lorig and ERA Care and had an extensive discussion on elements that would be included in the draft Advice.
- On March 29, the Stakeholders approved the Advice for transmission to those involved, including the Mayor and Director of the Department of Planning and Development. The

Stakeholders' advice will become part of the official record to be considered by the City Council in deciding the Northgate Commons land use approvals.

The Principal Recommendations of the Stakeholders:

The Northgate Stakeholders Group evaluated multiple elements of the project, including pedestrian connections between the Lorig property, the Thornton Creek Channel property, and the surrounding area; public access connections between the Lorig and Seattle Public Utilities property; and changes to allowed building heights and a parking capacity reduction. By far the greatest attention was paid to the anticipated request by both Lorig and ERA Care for a reduction in the amount of parking to be provided, including the approach to determining the demand for parking spaces the project's use will generate, and the plan to meet some of that demand through a shared parking relationship with King County Metro. The Stakeholders also examined drawings to better understand the height rezone request needed because both the Northgate Commons and ERA Care segments of the project exceed current height requirements. Stakeholders expect to review future proposed commercial uses to the extent they significantly impact parking, traffic patterns, and pedestrian movement.

The Northgate Stakeholders Group recognizes the important role Northgate Commons and ERA Care will play in redevelopment of the area, in conjunction with the development of the Thornton Creek Channel. The overall project is destined to create high quality public open spaces that will enhance the area's quality of life. The Northgate Stakeholders Group endorses the proposed rezones to change the maximum height from 65 feet to 85 feet, and the modification of development standards related to minimum parking requirements based upon information provided to the Design Review Board on March 21.

The Stakeholders' endorsement incorporates two additional expectations:

--- that the City, Lorig and ERA Care continue to improve the street edges and perimeters of the development, including pedestrian circulation and connections, the transparency of the project on NE 103rd, and how the buildings will look to those outside and intersect with 103rd, 5th Ave. NE, and the new 3rd Ave. NE. These measures could substantially improve the quality of the development and its fit with the neighborhood.

--- that the City continue discussions with Lorig and ERA Care on specific steps that will be taken to monitor and address the situation if the parking estimates and use patterns made during this planning stage are significantly different after the development is completed.

The Stakeholders request a briefing at their summer meeting regarding the status of these two matters, the overall progress of this project, and the individual issues raised below. In addition, Stakeholders expect to participate in discussions between the City and the developers on natural drainage options for the project.

Additional Issues for Consideration:

In addition to the above key issues related to the conceptual design, individual Stakeholders raised the following issues and questions. Some of these issues have been resolved to date, but Stakeholders request additional information and responses to questions as the project planning continues after this Advice memo. We specifically request that Lorig and ERA Care work with the Design Review Board to address as many of the issues as possible within the Design Review Board's authority to grant departures for design-related issues. At the time of the Master Use Permit application, we request that Lorig send a letter to the Northgate Stakeholders to explain how the following issues and questions were dealt with.

- The uses most likely to occupy the retail space.
- The feasibility of 16' sidewalks on the site's perimeter.
- The final details of the parking proposal, including which spaces will be sold or rented; the impact of pricing structures for rental spaces on automobile traffic; the basis for parking projections at both the residential units and the ERA Care facility; the comparability of other sites in the region that were used for parking estimates; the sharing arrangement with King County Metro; the availability of FlexCar and transportation demand management services in relation to the project; ERA Care's approach to visitor parking and to pick-up and drop-off; recalculation of parking needs as proposed uses change; and enforcement of parking limits.
- The specific parts of the Northgate Commons and ERA Care buildings that would exceed height maximums; how these heights would appear from outside the property
- Setback from the west side of the Thornton Creek Channel.
- Spacing of curb cuts on the ERA Care property.
- Whether overhangs or awnings will be included on the street side.
- The view of the Thornton Creek Channel given the trees and the need to place the trees in an irregular fashion, not a formal pattern.
- The number of pedestrian crossings over the Thornton Creek Channel and the integration into the plan of natural drainage solutions impacting both the City and Lorig/ERA Care properties, including, but not limited to, rain gardens, pervious pavers, natural plantings and swale.
- The nature and adequacy of the publicly-accessible "town square" space and other open spaces.
- Merits of a possible grocery store on site.